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ABSTRACT

Preschool children need instruction in movement in order to become skillful movers. A child-centered approach emphasizes activities that are child-initiated and teacher-facilitated, enabling each child to achieve specific goals and objectives. Many teacher strategies and classroom routines support the child-centered approach. As an alternative to large group activities, teachers can establish four or five different stations in the room. Only one activity station should involve turn taking, since preschoolers are just developing that skill. The Preschool Movement Program offers adapted physical education, which enhances each child's development by offering an inclusive, child-centered learning environment that encourages self-direction and social interaction. The program also helps to develop functional skills that will be used throughout life. The Preschool Movement Program is designed to help students develop fitness and motor planning, and enables them to master the fundamental movements of locomotor skills, object control skills, and stability. The program adapts continually and creates equipment to enable students with limited mobility to function more independently. Activities can include: (1) "Big on Balloons" (striking, catching, kicking, and throwing balloons); (2) "Mat Maze" (moving through a mat maze to find their way out); and (3) "Scooter Play" (maneuvering scooters while sitting or lying down). (SM)

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Preschool movement programs: Designing developmentally appropriate, inclusive curricula and games

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The following materials are from the new book:

McCall, R. and Craft, D. (2000). **Moving with a purpose: Developing programs for preschoolers of all abilities.** Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Children need many opportunities during the first years of life as they strive to become proficient movers. This period of motor development is so critical in a child's life that one who has not mastered fundamental movement skills during preschool years is at a disadvantage. "The critical time for the development of motor skills is between eighteen and sixty months of age" (Charlesworth, 1992, p. 242). Instruction is movement is necessary for preschoolers to become skillful movers. The goals is to have preschool children master a set of fundamental skills that will form a foundation for more complex skills the children will learn as they mature. Free play alone is typically insufficient for preschoolers to become skillful movers.

Meaningful movement programs focus on children LEARNING. Preschoolers learn optimally by exploring and experimenting with movement. Teaching by encouraging children to learn through using their natural instincts to explore and experiment is called *child-centered approach.*

Child Centered Approach

The child centered approach emphasizes activities that are child initiated and teacher facilitated to enable each child to achieve specific goals and objectives. The child centered approach:

- is consistent with developmentally appropriate practices. The learning experiences are planned based on what each child is ready to learn.
- works with young children's natural interest in exploration and experimentation.
- includes many opportunities for the child, rather than the teacher, to initiate the activity within the environment that the teacher has created. "While the teacher will select some activities and movements, most activities used for intervention are based upon what motivates and interests the child" (Block & Davis, 1996, p. 237). Child initiated activities are similar to Walt Davis' Ecological Task Analysis approach to teaching, in that both use activities that the child has selected within an environment that the teacher has designed. Child initiated activities are also consistent with Muska Mosston's guided discovery teaching style, in which children control

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much of the learning process as the teacher guides them to discover the solution to problems posed by the teacher.

- focuses on children LEARNING. The teacher identifies goals and objectives for each child, based on their individual needs and current abilities. All activities are designed to be fun and playful, but the overall goal is for the children to learn (Block & Davis, 1996).
- encourages the teacher to guide and facilitate learning rather than direct children.
- is consistent with activity-based intervention that seems particularly appropriate for children with special needs (Bricker & Cripe, 1992).

A child centered approach is supported through the following **teaching strategies and classroom routines**.

- Create a learning environment that screams "Welcome, I am so glad you are here."
- Let each child know that he or she is important.
- Create a routine for the beginning of each class.
- Use music as a signal to start and stop the activity.
- Create boundaries that clearly indicate where the children are and are not to go.
- Give brief, concise instructions.
- Select an activity in which all children are actively engaged and focused.
- Select an activity that allows the freedom to roam the area facilitating.
- Keep each activity open-ended.
- Create a friendly atmosphere accepting of individual differences.
- Allow the children a feeling of control over the activity.
- When using multiple stations, plan only one station with equipment that requires constant adult supervision.
- When using multiple stations, plan only one activity station that involves turn taking.

Child centered teaching strategies and station activities

As an alternative to a large group activity, design **four or five different stations** in the room that each involve throwing. If planned appropriately, there is no problem allowing the children to roam freely from station to station to experience what each offers. It becomes their choice to either remain at a crowded station and wait for a turn or to move on. No matter where the children choose to go, the lesson is designed so that the children are involved in the skill of throwing. When using **multiple stations, plan only one station with equipment that requires constant adult supervision**. Equipment of this type might include:

- targets that need to be reset. Plastic bottles and foam shapes are motivating targets but they need to be set up again and again after the children knock them down. If an adult is unavailable to reset the targets, plastic bottles can be tied at intervals along a rope and suspended. Consider also tying bells along the rope that will makes stimulating sounds when the bottles are hit. The sounds help motive children to continue throwing. Other ideas for creating stationary targets include: throwing beanbags at tires stacked along a wall, throwing fleece balls at balloons tied to suspended ropes, throwing foam balls at basketball hoops or into the cut out mouth of a face painted on plywood or cardboard.

- balls that roll all over the place - with the children chasing them! To maximize activity time, position a station that uses many loose pieces of equipment so that the children are throwing toward a wall, thus containing the balls and target pieces in a small area. This is preferable to standing against the wall and throwing toward the center of the room where the balls and

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target pieces can scatter into other activity areas. At other throwing stations use foam gator balls, fleece balls, beanbags, and other objects that stay where they land.

Recognize that taking turns is a skill that preschoolers are just developing. **Plan only one activity station that involves turn taking**, and then only if there is an adult available to stay at that station. When children do have to wait, create an interesting waiting area complete with cartoon characters with bright primary colors.

Adapted Physical Education Mission Statement:
Preschool children need to move - to be happy, to express themselves, develop their bodies, their intellect, and their motor skills. At this critical phase of human development, learning to move and learning through movement is a vital part of every child's developmental process. The Preschool Movement Program seeks to enhance each child's development through offering an inclusive, child-centered learning environment that encourages social interaction and self-direction. It also strives to develop functional skills to be used through life, especially for those children with restricted abilities. The program is designed to help children develop their fitness and motor planning, and to enable them to master the fundamental movements of locomotor skills, object control skills, and stability. The Preschool Movement Program will, additionally, continually adapt and create equipment to enable children with limited mobility to function more independently. Active participation for all students is fostered through the use of skill stations, multiple option activities and group games. The content of each lesson throughout the year is planned to guide students toward improving their affective, cognitive, and motor development."

The Preschool Movement C urricular Goals

Preschool movement program goals in the **affective** domain:
- To strengthen the way children feel about themselves:
  - To develop positive self images and self esteem
  - To develop self-motivation to become independent learners who confidently chose to be active
- To develop social skills:
  - To learn to share and cooperate and take turns
  - To learn to play and talk safely
- To develop joyful and purposeful play

Preschool movement program goals in the **cognitive** domain:
- To learn how to communicate
- To learn basic rules and game play
- To learn to follow directions
- To learn to recognize objects, colors, shapes
- To learn about body awareness
  - To identify body parts
  - To identify movement concepts:
    - effort (time, force, flow)
    - shape (self-space, general space, levels - high, low)
      - relationships (of body parts, to objects and other children- over, under, in front, behind)

Preschool movement program goals in the **motor** domain:
- To learn rudimentary movement skills, if not already mastered

- To learn fundamental movement skills
  - To learn locomotor skills (walk, run, jump, gallop, hop, skip, leap)
  - To learn object control (throw, catch, kick, strike, bounce)
  - To learn stability (static and dynamic balance)
- To develop health-related physical fitness
  - To develop cardiovascular endurance
  - To develop muscular strength and endurance
- To develop motor planning (sequencing movements based on sensory input) and movement problem solving
- To develop functional and generalizable adaptations of motor skills, as needed
- To learn to use recreational equipment - tricycles, roller races, scooter, adapted as needed - to increase mobility.

Big on Balloons

Preschool children in a room with a lot of balloons will naturally practice the object control skills of striking, catching, kicking and throwing. Balloons don't move fast or far when struck, which makes them ideal for introducing these skills to preschool children. Along with being great fun, this activity is quick to set up and can be enjoyed in small or large spaces.

Overview
Children hit a balloon with any body part they can. The goal is to keep the balloon in the air as long as possible.

Preparation
Inflate many balloons in advance and keep them in large bags or boxes.

Directions
1) With children seated, demonstrate hitting balloons with different body parts to keep them in the air. Stress safety: DO NOT place a balloon near your mouth. If a balloon breaks, let an adult pick up the pieces.
2) Hand each child a balloon or dump balloons out of the boxes or bags. Turn on an upbeat music tape. Music provides natural motivation!
3) Encourage the children to shout out what body part they are using when hitting balloons.

Including children with special needs
For children unable to grasp standard size balloons, only partially inflate a balloon and place it inside a non-latex protective glove. The child can now experience the feeling of playing with a balloon while controlling it more easily by grasping any of the empty finger slots of the glove. For children with visual impairments, attach a bell to brightly colored balloons.

Variations
- Use a small foam racquet or one made with a hanger and stocking to keep the balloon in the air
- Drop the balloons from a higher elevation than the children and have them reach up and try to catch the balloon and then place it in a big box. This is most successful when you do it with three to four children at a time. This activity is great for children with IEP goals involving extension!
- Tie balloons to a rope extended across an open space. Have children hit the balloons with either body parts or soft racquets. Vary the height of the balloons to accommodate all children, including those seated in wheelchairs.

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• Tie balloons to a rope, suspended at floor level, and allow students to practice kicking.
• Set up a low net 2-3 feet high and let several children practice hitting many balloons over the net at the same time. Have the net reach to the floor. Otherwise the children will inevitably try to go under it!
• Scatter balloons around the floor and have the children pick them up with rolled magazines or wooden dowels and place them in a box.

In smaller spaces
Many children can be playing together with balloons in a room. Use discretion in determining how many children can play safely at one time.

Goals for children:
• to improve throwing, catching, striking, or kicking
• to name body parts
Big on Balloons can easily be simplified for children who are learning the rudimentary skills of reaching and touching an object. It can also challenge those who can already control an object with their hands and are now ready to control an object using an extension of their hands - a racquet.

Equipment
• Balloons - 10" or larger helium quality balloons in various colors
IMPORTANT: If a child cannot be exposed to latex, cover the balloon with a non-latex protective glove or a cloth Balzac cover (available at most toy stores)
• Soft racquets or homemade rackets constructed from hangers covered with stockings are optional
• Music
• for a smaller area, use fewer balloons and have groups of children take turns

Curricular Goals
• body part identification
• object control

Balloons in a small space? Jimmy can hit the balloon up as high and hard as he wants and the balloon won't hurt the furniture, the walls, or another child.

Mat Maze

An attractive maze made from folding mats standing on end and obstacles placed within keeps preschool children moving non-stop. Mazes allow children to plan their movements and focus on spatial awareness, skills necessary for remembering how to get home and, as they become adults, for negotiating highway lane changes.

Overview
Children will walk, run, gallop and jump their way through the maze trying to find the way out.

Preparation
Here is a suggested diagram of how a mat maze can look.

Directions
The children will all enter the maze at the same opening. Depending on the size of the maze and the number of children involved, provide one, two, or several ways to exit. Either way, let the children have fun exploring the different paths and learning how to redirect themselves when they come upon a dead end. Play upbeat background music!

Including children with special needs
Create a maze with pathways that are wide enough so those children using mobility equipment can fit through the aisles. Children with visual impairments can feel their way through the maze, or use adult assistance or verbal cues to orient themselves.

Variations
- Create tunnels and slides within the mat maze.
- Place 'surprises' along the way such as stuffed animals sitting in chairs or silly pictures hanging on the wall.
- Challenge the children to find specific destinations within the maze. Give children stickers and ask them to find the pictures within the maze that go with the stickers.

In smaller spaces
Set up a smaller maze and select equipment to fit the space available. Consider draping sheets over chairs and tables and have children crawl through the maze.

Goals for Children
- to develop a sense of directionality
- to improve locomotor skills

Equipment
- Folding mats positioned on edge to stand upright
- Large crash mats and other pieces of equipment that serve as partitions
- Substitute chairs, tires, or draped sheets, to serve as barriers if mats are not available.

Curricular Goals
- locomotor skills
- motor planning

Set up the maze in an area where everyone can use it over several days. Once set up, the mat maze runs itself. Children have such fun exploring the endless ways of moving over, around and through the maze.

Scooter Play

Children love using scooters. While moving on the scooters, children are simultaneously building their endurance, strength, and ability to coordinate arm and leg muscle movements.

Overview
Children learn to maneuver scooters, while sitting or lying down, propelling themselves in a variety of manners.

Preparation
Provide one scooter for each child, along with hula-hoops, clothesline rope, or equipment to make an obstacle course, according to which activity is selected.

Directions
Below are general directions that apply to each of the three scooter activities that follow.
1) With the children sitting in a group, away from the scooters, briefly explain and demonstrate the scooter activity of the day.
2) Identify the boundaries for the activity. Review safety rules including: never stand on a scooter or put your fingers under the wheels. To minimize pinched fingers, show how to hang on to the side handles of the scooter. Or, if the scooter is handle-free, show how you would place your hands away from the wheels, such as resting your hands on your knees.
4) Distribute the scooters or let the children go to where the scooters are parked and begin the activity.
5) At the end of the activity, have the children return the scooters to the place where they were parked.

Scooters and hula hoops: One child lies or sits on the scooter, hanging on to a hula hoop, while a second child pulls the first child around the room. On a given cue, the two children switch places.

Scooter pulls: Tie one or more clotheslines across a room at a height those children using a scooter can reach. The children lie down on their scooters and pull themselves hand-over-hand along the ropes. Table legs or other heavy furniture can serve to anchor the clothesline ropes in a classroom.

Scooter course: Set up a scooter obstacle course with tunnels to maneuver under, small ramps to glide down, and zig zag paths to follow. Include a scooter pull. Create a course that challenges the children to shift positions on the scooter from sitting to lying on their stomachs, and to propel the scooter using both their hands and their feet.

Including children with special needs
Children with limited mobility can easily participate when provided with scooters suited for their needs. Children with visual impairments are easily accommodated in scooter activities because the hoops and ropes used guide them around the room.

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